

FFG
VERSION 1.4, NOVEMBER 2022

EVALUATION MANUAL FOR FFG SELECTION PROCESS MODEL 1 FUNDING (APPLICATION CALLS)

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1 PREAMBLE

The FFG calls are carried out on the basis of harmonised funding instruments. These define the specific criteria and conditions for the individual projects (e.g. Company Project, Cooperative Research Project, Feasibility Study etc.). The calls use a specific mix of instruments depending on the call objectives. An overview of the [instruments](#) is given on the FFG website.

The instruments provide consistent selection and processing standards. The following evaluation manuals are used in the FFG selection procedure:

Figure 1: Overview of evaluation manuals

Application procedure – ongoing submission	Competitive procedure
<p>Model 1 Fast-track procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation: internal and/or external reviews, simplified evaluation scheme – Funding recommendation: call management or advisory committee 	<p>Model 3 External evaluation committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation: internal and/or external reviews – Funding recommendation: external evaluation committee (FFG has no vote) – Distinction between <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Model 3a for funding – Model 3b for financing
<p>Model 2 Standard procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation: internal reviews, external reviews if necessary – Funding recommendation: advisory committee (FFG has no vote) 	<p>Model 4 External evaluation committee plus hearing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation: internal and/or external reviews – Hearings: essential element of the evaluation process – Funding recommendation: external evaluation committee (FFG has no vote)

2 KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

The present evaluation manual refers exclusively to selection procedures according to Model 1.

The aim of the selection procedure is to select eligible projects from the formally correct funding applications submitted in good time based on the criteria of the relevant funding instrument.

The evaluation committee is put together depending on the expertise required to evaluate the funding applications submitted and is composed of internal (FFG) and/or external, national and/or international, independent and unbiased experts.

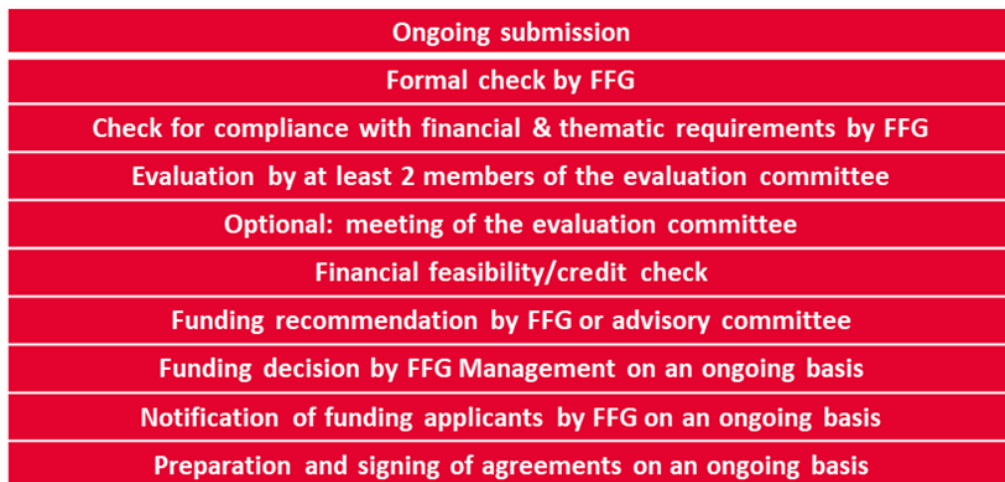
The names of the persons involved in the evaluation process remain anonymous as a matter of principle and will not be communicated externally.

3 EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

3.1 Overview

The following diagram shows the evaluation and selection procedure.

Figure 2: Schematic of evaluation and selection procedure



3.2 Checks and evaluation

The evaluation of the funding applications includes:

- checks carried out by the FFG,
- evaluation by the members of the evaluation committee and
- optional: meeting of the evaluation committee

3.2.1 Checks by FFG

The FFG will check all applications submitted within the deadline for compliance with formal, financial and thematic requirements in accordance with the specified process and the check lists/templates. The results of the formal and compliance checks will be documented in the FFG's electronic documentation systems.

Formal check:

The FFG will check the applications for completeness based on check lists and will ensure data capture. The criteria examined in the formal check can be found in the Call Guidelines. The funding applicants will be informed about the result of the formal check in good time. The applicants will be notified of any correctable deficiencies detected and will be requested to make appropriate corrections within a reasonable period of time, or the application will be excluded from the further process for formal reasons.

Compliance checks:

All funding applications approved for further evaluation following the formal check will be prepared for the evaluation committee by FFG staff. This involves the following compliance checks:

– **Check for compliance with thematic requirements:**

This check covers topics such as multiple funding, project history, incentive effect, unusual ownership structure and call-specific aspects. This check will not be carried out in simplified evaluation procedures.

– **Check for compliance with financial requirements:**

The FFG checks the funding applications for compliance with the guidelines (compliance with any specific funding conditions, allocation to correct organisation category, correct and transparent cost breakdown, compliance with cost limits for work packages, ...) and may make suggestions for cost cuts. This check will not be carried out in simplified evaluation procedures.

– **Check of SME status:**

In cases where small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) may profit from better funding conditions or where only SMEs are eligible to submit applications the details provided on company size must be checked in accordance with the European Commission's User Guide to the SME Definition.

The FFG checks are designed to compile and prepare information provided in the funding applications for the members of the evaluation committee but not to assess their contents. In no case will a project be excluded due to its contents at this stage of the selection procedure.

Applications may, however, be excluded if the information provided is found to be incorrect in the course of the compliance checks. The reason for this is that the formal check serves only to examine whether the information provided by the funding applicant meets the call requirements, but not whether it is true and correct (e.g. SME status).

Financial feasibility/creditworthiness check:

Once the funding recommendation has been made (see section 3.3), the FFG will check the financial capacity of companies involved in the projects recommended for funding. The check includes both the financial situation (creditworthiness) of the company and the financial feasibility of the funding application (residual financing). In order for funding to be granted both the financial feasibility check and the creditworthiness check must be positive. If this is not the case, the companies concerned will not be eligible for funding. The creditworthiness check also serves to examine whether the company is an undertaking in difficulty¹. Undertakings in difficulty are not eligible for funding. The individual financial feasibility and creditworthiness check will not be carried out in simplified evaluation procedures.

3.2.2 Tasks of the members of the evaluation committee

Rules of procedure will be issued for the evaluation committee, except in cases where a simplified evaluation procedure is carried out. Each funding application will be assessed by at least two (in simplified evaluation procedures at least one) external or internal reviewers as members of the evaluation committee.

The members of the evaluation committee will assess the applications in a confidential, fair, neutral, unbiased and independent manner based on the procedure set out in this Evaluation Manual, which is described in more detail in the Guide for Evaluators. The points awarded in the main and sub-criteria must be substantiated by comments. This is done by indicating the **strengths and/or weaknesses** in the individual criteria and by giving three key arguments justifying the funding recommendation or rejection in the overall assessment. No points are awarded in simplified evaluation procedures.

The following funding recommendations can be made as a result of the evaluation:

- Funding without conditions
- Funding subject to conditions:
 - The conditions must be clearly formulated such that they can be verified by the FFG and implemented within a specified period of time.
 - As a rule of thumb, not more than three conditions and requirements relating to the thematic content should be imposed, otherwise the funding application is to be questioned in its entirety.
 - Conditions and requirements involving a substantial change to the funding application should be avoided.
 - Conditions and requirements intervening in the consortium structure should be avoided.
- Rejection:
 - Rejections must be formulated clearly, in accordance with the relevant selection criteria and in a form that can be communicated to the funding applicants.

¹ The decision on whether a company is regarded as being “in difficulty” will be based on the definition provided in the General Block Exemption Regulation (OJ L 187 p. 19), which is the legal basis for the relevant funding scheme under EU law.

The members of the evaluation committee shall examine the submitted costs for plausibility and may cut costs, if necessary, taking into account the following:

- They should provide a clear and substantiated statement indicating which cost category of which partner will be affected by the cost cuts, and to what extent.
- Global cost cuts at project level should be generally avoided and are only admissible in justified exceptional cases.
- The funding guidelines must be observed, for example, whether the cooperative relationship will be negatively affected by the cost cuts.

The members of the evaluation committee may make additional recommendations concerning the funding application. In contrast to conditions and requirements, however, recommendations are not binding.

External reviewers must sign a **Declaration of Confidentiality and Impartiality** before being given access to the documents required for reviewing a funding application. Internal (FFG) reviewers need not sign such a declaration as they are generally subject to FFG's compliance provisions.

3.2.3 Objective of the evaluation

- A recommendation of eligibility for funding is made for each funding application:
 - Conditions and recommendations have been formulated, if necessary.
 - Rejections have been justified consistently.
- Overall costs and funding amounts are set for each funding application

3.2.4 Result of the evaluation

The following table describes the possible results of the evaluation.

Table 1: Procedure for evaluating the funding applications at the meeting of the evaluation committee

Procedure	Details
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The funding applications are evaluated based on the strengths and weaknesses identified in the main and sub-criteria (for simplified evaluation procedures: are the criteria met? yes/no)
Eligibility for funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Eligible for funding with/without conditions, not eligible for funding
Funding conditions or reasons for rejection	<p>Funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Determination of eligible costs – Justification for cost cuts, if applicable – Determination of funding rate – Formulation of recommendations, if applicable – Formulation of conditions, if applicable <p>Rejection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Formulation of rejection

3.2.5 Financial feasibility/creditworthiness check

The FFG will check the financial capacity of companies involved in the projects recommended for funding by majority vote of the evaluation committee (see section 3.2.1). The individual financial feasibility and creditworthiness check will not be carried out in simplified evaluation procedures.

3.3 Funding recommendation

The FFG will compile the results of the evaluation committee into a funding recommendation in compliance with the guidelines and the call (exception: simplified evaluation procedure with one evaluator).

The funding recommendation will be sent to the FFG Management.

3.4 From funding decision to contract

The FFG Management will make the funding decision on behalf and for the account of the Federal Government based on the funding recommendation submitted.

Following formal approval (= funding decision), all funding applicants will be notified of the result in writing.

The subsequent contract preparation process will be initiated by the FFG. The minutes and the funding recommendation/decision form the basis for this process. The FFG is responsible for monitoring compliance with the conditions imposed as well as for subsequent project monitoring and administration.

4 EVALUATION DETAILS

The following explanations do not apply to simplified evaluation procedures.

The funding applications are assessed according to the following 4 main criteria:

- 1** Quality of the funding application
- 2** Suitability of funding applicants/project participants
- 3** Benefit and exploitation
- 4** Relevance of the funding application to the call

The main criteria and the defined sub-criteria (including the weightings) can be found in the relevant technical guidelines and call guidelines (in the event of combined guidelines).

Criteria that are not applicable can be omitted if this is consistent with the logic of the funding instrument or call. This must be defined in the technical guidelines or call guidelines, if required.

The evaluation scheme is divided into 6 levels:

Table 2: Evaluation scheme

Sign	Explanation	Points	Description
+++	Excellent	100	The project meets the criterion very well and to the full extent . The assessment has revealed only strengths and no relevant weaknesses.
++	Good	80	The project meets the criterion well and to a predominant extent . In addition to the predominant strengths, several concrete weaknesses have been identified.
+	Sufficient	60	The project meets the criterion to a sufficient extent . The strengths slightly outweigh the weaknesses.
-	Poor	40	The project meets the criterion to an inadequate extent . The weaknesses outweigh the strengths.
--	Very poor	20	The project addresses/meets the criterion to a very inadequate extent . The weaknesses clearly outweigh the few strengths.
---	Insufficient	0	The project does not meet the criterion.

The points awarded for each criterion must be accompanied by a written justification for the assessment. This written justification is of key importance as it provides the basis for the overall evaluation and for communicating the results of the selection procedure to the funding applicants (e.g. formulation of reasons for rejection if the application has been assessed as not eligible for funding). The funding applications are assessed by formulating the strengths and weaknesses of the application with regard to each of the sub-criteria specified in the evaluation scheme.

If required, e.g. if the reviews are contradictory or inconclusive, additional reviews may be requested. A majority of the reviews must be positive or negative.

These strengths and weaknesses of the funding application form the basis for the overall evaluation and the awarding of points.

In the overall evaluation the members of the evaluation committee formulate their key arguments for and against funding of the application. These arguments refer to the strengths and weaknesses identified in the individual evaluation criteria. These arguments and the specific strengths and weaknesses of the application form the basis for written communications to the funding applicants.

The reviews may also be used to formulate conditions and/or recommendations.